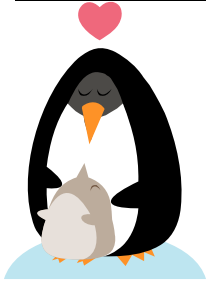




Fostering Across Wisconsin

*A publication of the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center
in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services*

Vol. 2. No. 4



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Focus on Parenting

This edition of Fostering Across Wisconsin deals with parenting and issues that make foster and adoptive parenting unique. As you take on the daily challenges and rewards of foster and adoptive parenting, we wanted to offer some thoughts from families across Wisconsin and share some of the resources we have available for you and your family. During November, National Adoption Month, we would also like to honor those families who have adopted children from foster care. Thanks to all of our families for your commitment to children – for a short time or forever.

Below is a reflection on parenting by Toni Chambers.

“Fair does not mean equal.”

I first heard the phrase when teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Fair meant getting what you needed, and, in a classroom, the goal was to help everyone get what he or she needed. What parent hasn't heard, “That isn't fair!” from one child or another? It doesn't matter how the children came to be a part of the family – birth, adoption, foster, neighbor kids, visiting nieces or nephews, a parent is likely to hear it – and that's ok. It most likely means you're meeting the individual needs of a given child which is what effective parenting requires. We try our best to meet the needs of every child in our care.

My now 17-year-old was quite an ‘easy’ youngster (don't roll your eyes; he's making up for it now). When he was a toddler and about to embark on something less than desirable, at least from my perspective, I could simply clap my hands or call his name, and he would stop dead in his tracks, turn and look at me with a quivering lip – seldom did he need to be corrected more than once. Then my second child was born. Christopher was a whole different story. Christopher required full physical contact to get his attention, and the waters were tested several times before he would abandon his mission.

Children haven't changed much over the years; they are individuals with individual needs, and we try to parent them according to those needs. It's really not much different, in my experience, when it comes to foster parenting. Children in out-of-home care require individualized parenting, as well; they deserve it, just as all children do. It can be challenging at times, not knowing exactly what the needs of a child might be. Mistakes are made, but we learn with time. Setting limits, granting privileges, giving the benefit of the doubt or an extra dessert are all ways of parenting to meet the needs of a child. Not all children need the same thing; they don't need everything to be equal – they need fair, and fair is getting what they need.

Toni Chambers is a foster parent and former special education teacher. She provides training and helps develop curriculum for foster and adoptive families through the Western Wisconsin Child Welfare Training Partnership. Thanks and appreciation to Toni for her willingness to contribute to this edition.

*Live Deeper, Love Wider, Leave Bigger
Become a Foster Parent*



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Moving from Foster Parenting to Adoption

Many foster parents make the decision to adopt one or more of the children they foster. Being an adoptive parent has some distinct differences from being a foster parent. Here are some important things to know and think about when considering adopting a child from foster care:

- Adoption, unlike fostering, is permanent. The life history of your adopted child has changed permanently; he or she has officially become part of your collective family life history. Honor and recognize that history. Remember too, that your family's goals and experiences, whatever they may be, are now shared by the child.
- Foster parents share parenting authority with the state and the child's family. This requires permission to make many decisions about the child. Adoption allows the adoptive parent to make day-to-day decisions affecting the child.
- You will bear financial responsibility for your child and the special needs your child may have. Learn about the subsidies that you may be able to access and understand what services will no longer be available to you.
- The child will experience attachment ups and downs. Recognize the child's adjustment to this new role in your family. If possible, keep in contact with the child's birth family and other important individuals to the child (e.g., extended birth family, tribal members) to support successful transitions and keep the child connected to his or her history and culture. Help the child grieve his or her losses and feelings. Discuss the adoption before, during, and after the process. Celebrate and treasure the event.

Information used for this article came from the following helpful resources:

- Adoption.Com; Foster Child Adoption: <http://foster-child.adoption.com/>
- Child Welfare Information Gateway; Foster Parents Considering Adoption: http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_fospar.cfm
- Child Welfare Information Gateway; Helping Your Foster Child Transition to Your Adopted Child Factsheet for Families: http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_transition.cfm
- Adoption.Com; Online guide to adopting from foster care: <http://foster-child.adoption.com/guide/foster-adoption-ebook.html>
- Fahlberg, V. (1991). A child's journey through placement. Indianapolis: Perspective's Press. (Available from the Resource Center).

The Wisconsin Post Adoption Resource Centers provide information and support for adoptive families. To find one in your area go to:

<http://www.wiadopt.org/AdoptionResourcesOfWisconsin.aspx>.

Recommended Resources

Attachment Facilitating Parenting (VHS, M1333*) by Becher-Weidman, Arthur. Published by Center for Family Development. 2005.

This video educates parents about attachment issues and what they can do to help children overcome trauma and attach to their foster or adoptive family. It features parents and children discussing their experiences and what helps children attach to a new family.

My Brother Bit Me! Parenting Siblings (DVD, O7041*) (Study Guide included) by Louise Welsh Schrank. Published by Learning Seed, 1998.

Viewers learn how to give all their children individual attention without playing favorites and how to help kids learn to solve conflicts on their own.

Our Own: Adopting & Parenting the Older Child (Book, B2292*) by Trish Maskew. Published by SnowCap Press, 1999.

Parents will consult this book for its common sense and compassionate approach to the joys and challenges of adding an older child to the family.

More resources on Page 3



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Sharing a Common Goal: Shared Parenting Connecting for the Sake of Children

How do you share the parenting role with a child's parents? Jennifer Kingslien, shares her thoughts and opinions on the positive aspects of shared parenting.

The desire to belong, to be connected to family, is a powerful and driving force for all of us, including children in foster care. Children in care all have family histories; their lives do not begin when they walk through your doorway. "Shared parenting," or caring for a child in partnership with their family, promotes a spirit of collaboration, cooperation, support, and respect which honors that child and their family.

When foster parents practice shared parenting, they establish a cooperative and supportive partnership with the child's birth parents that is focused on meeting the needs of the child. Shared parenting is an incredible effort that benefits everyone by maintaining and strengthening family connections. These vital connections will provide children with a lifetime of potential support, guidance, and assistance.

By partnering with his or her birth parents, you are truly honoring the child and the important relationships in his or her life. While you will not be able to change the negative experiences that may have occurred, you will be able to shape and positively influence his or her life by establishing a respectful and collaborative relationship with the child's family that can extend well beyond the time the placement ends with your family.

For additional information read "Shared Parenting Benefits Everyone—Especially Foster Parents!" by Janine Russell and John McMahon, *Fostering Perspectives*, Volume 10, No. 1 November 2005 found online at:

http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/fp/fp_v10n1/shared.htm

Jennifer Kingslien and her husband Peter have been licensed foster parents with the Dane County Department of Health and Human Services for 17 years. They have fostered over 50 youth and adopted 5 children. Jennifer is a retired teacher who provides training to prospective special needs adoptive parents through Children's Service Society and MATC. Thanks to Jennifer Kingslien for sharing her thoughts and opinions about shared parenting.

Resources cont'd from Page 2

Parenting Someone Else's Child: The Foster Parents' How To Manual (Book, F5069*) by Ann Stressman. Published by Aha! Process, Inc., 2004.

This book is a wealth of information for parents told with humor and grace by a person who has fostered more than 100 children. It's "nothing can surprise me" compilation of stories includes approaches for hundreds of the parenting situations that arise.

Parenting the Hurt Child: Helping Adoptive Families Heal and Grow (Book, C2392*) by Keck, Gregory and Kupecky, Regina. Published by Pinon Press, 2002.

When a child is adopted, he or she can arrive with hurts from the past – pain that stunts his or her emotional growth, and your family's life too. With time, patience, informed parenting, and appropriate therapy your adopted child can heal, grow, and develop beyond what seems possible now.

The Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center has many more books contained within our library regarding this topic and many more related to foster care and adoption. Please visit our library at:

<http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/dnav/67/page.htm> or call us at 1-800-947-8074

** The starred number is the reference number for the FCARC library. You can request materials by their title, author, or reference number.*



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Focus on 56: Working with the Agency

Sometimes working together isn't always easy, and sometimes we may not all agree. However, even when foster parents, birth parents, and case workers cannot agree, foster parents are required to cooperate fully with the licensing agency and any other agency responsible for supervising the foster child and to keep those agencies updated with information about the child according to s. 56.05(1)(c)3., Adm. Code.

For example, it may be hard for foster parents to think about a child leaving their home, especially if the situation the child was removed from may seem to have improved only slightly. The small improvement may mean the difference between a child who wasn't safe before being safe now with his or her family. It's alright for a foster parent to say that dealing with a child leaving is hard or to disagree with an agency's decision, but foster parents ultimately need to move forward with plans the agency establishes for a child.

If a foster parent has serious concerns about the safety of a child during a family interaction or reunification that they agency has planned, those specific concerns must be reported to the licensing and supervising agencies immediately. Case workers need a variety of information from foster parents to make sure that the decisions they are making – the decisions foster parents must work with them to implement – protect and assure the safety of children.

Foster Parent Support Resources in Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (WFAPA) works hard to support and advocate for the needs of foster and adoptive families by operating a website with information about the creation of local chapters, publishing a quarterly newsletter, hosting two conferences every year, and working across the state on behalf of issues that are important to foster parents and foster children.

To find out more about WFAPA, visit their website at www.wfapa.org. For more information about other support groups, associations, and resources available in Wisconsin, contact us at 1-800-947-8074. We can provide you with information about the resources closest to you.

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